

## **The integration of children with special needs in Bulgaria**

Compared to other EU countries, Bulgaria's policies regarding the integration of special needs children into mainstream schools are extremely under developed. Many children are in special institutions, where a small percentage of them receive little or no education.

Children with special needs can be either integrated in to mainstream schools or taken care of in special needs schools, the latter often being boarding schools. Special needs students are examined by a committee that evaluates their degree of need.

The European Committee for Social Rights has recommended that the Bulgarian government look into the possibility of integrating more special needs children into mainstream schools and that they should set deadlines to accomplish this; but many schools do not have the required facilities, so many students will have to wait until they are provided.

Fortunately, there are some private schools in Sofia which have special educators and facilities for children with special needs. One of them is **Petko Rachov Slaveikov**, a private school which last year won a European project for integrating children with special educational needs, in co-operation with two state schools. More than 3 children have enrolled this September. Parents are very thankful to the dedicated teachers who daily spend precious time with their children.

The new Principal, Nadia Stoikova, and her team of teachers are planning to win more projects and they believe that God has plenty of friends to help them financially to enable them to reach out to more children with special needs.

**Yvonna Stoilova**